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James P. Barber Ph.D.

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Barber: Using Research to Defy Expectations

USING RESEARCH TO DEFY EXPECTATIONS

JAMES P. BARBER, PH.D., *ORACLE* EDITOR

There is a certain comfort in the cyclical nature of life in higher education—we know what to expect at certain times of the year. As we make the finishing touches on this issue of *Oracle*, it's the beginning of a new academic year and the expected things are about to happen—move-in, orientation, and for some campuses, fraternity/sorority recruitment.

Sadly, racism, discrimination, sexual assault, and hazing are among the events that have become expected in our fraternity/sorority communities. These behaviors and attitudes are certainly not acceptable, nor tolerated, but based on past experience, no one should be surprised when they happen.

Interest in joining fraternities and sororities has been on the rise despite these tragic incidents and the heightened media attention they have sparked. This presents a challenging environment where even more undergraduates are entering communities plagued with dangerous traditions. We face a crisis that most other college organizations do not—students are being injured or killed because of joining our groups. How can research help us to address these issues? Some campus leaders have suspended or halted fraternity/sorority activities, but this is a short-term solution, not lasting change.

How can research help to address these issues, and effect lasting change in our communities? Research provides a systematic investigation to answer a question. Researchers use established tools and methods to collect information to answer that question. Research can help us to understand these phenomena, learn about student motivations, and seek solutions for the future. The findings from research establish a framework that gives us a sense of what we can expect next. However, it can only be effective when people use the findings in practice.

This issue of *Oracle* features four studies that address some of our most pressing problems today. Parker and Pascarella examine the ways in which exposure to diverse peers can benefit fraternity and sorority members, with clear relevance as undergraduates set out to recruit new members to join their chapters.

Roosevelt offers a new framework for addressing hazing behavior, using elements of psychology to understand student perceptions of the differences between activities that are physically dangerous and psychologically harmful, from those that are undesirable but not likely to result in harm (buffoonery). Salinas, Boettcher, and Plagman-Galvin analyze current state-level anti-hazing policies to provide an update on the legislative stances on hazing applied across the United States, most of which lack the nuance in definition described by Roosevelt.

Finally, Taylor, Zamora, McArdle, and Villa offer their findings about the ways in which fraternal organizations are reported in the media, and offer suggestions for how students, advisors, and headquarters can address negative press.

How will you use the findings presented in this issue as a professional? How will you communicate these findings to your students? The research is just one part of the process. If the research cannot be translated into action, it is useless in our communities. But, if research is understood and used to address those most pressing problems facing fraternities and sororities, it can help to defy expectations.

As we embark on a new academic year consider how you will use research in new ways to defy the expectations for ourselves, our organizations, and our students.